

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-22NEW YORK TIMES
4 MAY 1980

Soldiers of Fortune Support Magazine; Liberals Attack It

By MOLLY IVINS

Special to The New York Times

BOULDER, Colo. — Robert K. Brown, screeches around town in his red, four-wheel-drive Blazer, curses the "bleeding-heart liberals," fires exotic weapons at the rifle range and, most of all, puts out a magazine that has outraged liberals.

The magazine, *Soldier of Fortune*, bills itself as "the journal of professional adventurers." It contains a lot of adventure stories in the old style of *True and Argosy* and some solid information about guns, knives and fighting techniques. But what's causing the outrage is the magazine's classified ads section, which many people regard as information central for mercenary soldiers.

"Former merc," said one ad, "wants action high-risk dirty work. Expert small arms, automatic weapons, covert operations, personal protection. Travel anywhere anytime."

How Rhodesia Fighters Got Jobs

Daniel Gearhart, the Vietnam veteran who was executed as a mercenary in Angola in July 1976, got his job by placing an ad in *Soldier of Fortune*. According to reporters who covered the recent war in Rhodesia, the majority of the 400 to 500 American mercenaries fighting for the white-minority Government found their way there the same way.

Representative Patricia Schroeder, Democrat of Denver, has asked the Justice Department to investigate the magazine for possible violations of the Federal statutes that prohibit recruiting mercenaries or serving as one. But Mr. Brown says that he has been investigated repeatedly and that if he were recruiting, "I'd be in the slammer right now." He maintains that printing ads from people who say they are looking for dangerous work does not constitute recruiting.

He returned recently from one of his many trips to Rhodesia in recent years and announced, pleased as Punch, that he had finally gotten into a firefight. After consultation with his attorney on the law about serving as a mercenary, the following description of the incident was agreed upon: Mr. Brown was not in the uniform, pay nor employ of Rhodesia, nor was he fighting under the Rhodesian flag. As a journalist, he went out with a combat unit, found himself under attack and defended himself.

Mr. Brown does enjoy playing the role — he's always posing with rattlesnakes and guns, spitting tobacco and using language that would blister the paint off an outhouse — but it's not all a role: He was a good Golden Gloves boxer, he was in the Special Forces in Vietnam, he went into the Army Reserves and retired as a lieutenant colonel; he is considered a great shot and says he is mean as a cobra when angry.

A Placid Middle Western Childhood

Mr. Brown, 47 years old, was born in Monroe, Mich., the son of a steelworker, and had what he described as a placid Midwestern childhood. He went to the University of Michigan for two years and then transferred to the University of Colorado.

He has been involved in some strange escapades, including an abortive coup in the Dominican Republic some years back. For a time, he says, he and some buddies in southern Florida enjoyed exposing Central Intelligence Agency fronts in the area. Mr. Brown explains that he is not against the intelligence agency; he merely objects to its incompetence.

It is impossible to check on some of his stories, but the Army verifies Mr. Brown's version of his Army career and those who have known him for a long time swear by his honesty. In none of his tales does he figure as a great hero: He enjoys telling about abortive attempts at dering-do.

However, there is no question that he loves combat. He said, with unusual solemnity, that his tour in Vietnam was the high point of his life.

According to Mr. Brown, the warrior mentality is not a matter of a psychotic urge to kill, but a matter of wanting to prove oneself over and over. The men who read and write *Soldier of Fortune* seem to have a particular curiosity, a need to find out how they will react under fire. Mr. Brown cannot explain why.

Mr. Brown also said that of the magazine's 33,500 subscribers and its estimated 180,000 readers, "the vast majority are just Walter Mitty's."